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TALKING TO

TADEUSZ JAROSZYNSKI

The work of Yugoslavian-born artist Tadeusz Jaroszynski has been included in important collections in Europe and South Africa. His latest exhibition is currently on at the Everard Read Gallery

Style: Tell us about your genesis as an artist.

"I studied at the Finnish Academy for four-and-a-half, five years and then came to South Africa. Well, there was nothing going on here at the time; the art scene was dead, so I got a job and worked for ten years. What sort of job? Oh, business things, accounting . . . not important.

"You see artists weren't considered important here at the time; there was no vibrancy. We (Tadeusz and his wife, well-known artist Karin Jaroszynski) came into a landscape of pink sunsets and blue skies. I felt as if I had been cut off from European culture and had entered a void. It took a long time to recognise my work again. Yes, that's a good way of putting it . . . to recognise my work, because I've reached my fifties at last and there's been a lot of turmoil and soul-searching in-between. The angst, the uncertainty, it never leaves you but, with experience, you are fortified and go forward with a will. You learn, well, to recognise."

Style: What made you begin to paint again?

"I gave up everything in 1971 and started to paint full-time. That was a real disaster because it was all in the mind. I wanted to do so many things, but when you're a painter you have to work ten, twelve hours a day. It's like being a priest! Then in 1977 Karin and I pushed off to Europe. We were lucky: in France there was a gallery that liked my work and I was contracted to it for some years. Still, it was a struggle. We only made enough to live, but it was a nice struggle.

"We came back to South Africa for personal reasons and bought a farm in the northern Transvaal. Then I became a farmer. You see, I tried to destroy myself as an artist. I lost belief in

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myself, I just felt that things . . . Why does one do these things? Fortunately, it didn't last too long. I started to work again and this time I muddled my way through.

"I call that my second rebirth and I think my work has progressed since then. It's become stronger and stronger. Now I think I have something important to say. At last."

Style: How do your present series of paintings differ from earlier images?

"I've come back to realism, by which I mean you can recognise the object. During my learning period, I call it my fanciful journey, I just wanted to move paint around for a while, play with the freedom of colour and theme. I painted more abstractly then. Now I've combined both the realism and the freedom, the force that I mastered then. Of course there have been mistakes too. In fact, I think many of my works are mistakes, failures. But positive failures. To get there, that's the great thing.

Style: You seem haunted by those preoccupied three-quarter-length figures, usually female, against an opaque background.

"Yes, the images were a long time in coming. I work in a series, I can have fifteen canvases going at the same time. The oils are built up over a period of time.

"As for the theme . . . Well, I often think that a painter paints a picture or a few pictures with variations all his life. But it's not one image – how can one explain it? Look, when a guy writes a book he does it page by page. Perhaps that's what I mean, that each painting is a page in the book. Does that sound right? Anyway, for me what's more, or at least *as* important as the subject is the paint. I've never been a painter of washes and dribbles. I've tried to speak through the tactile quality of the paint, and the cleverer you get, no, the more confident you get, the more clearly you speak.

"But you've got to look at my work. I can't describe it. These are just my thoughts, not my work. Go to my work."

Style: The women, are they real people or imaginary figures?

"They become real people in the end."

Style: You are being enigmatic.

"Well, put it this way, I don't set out to depict individuals. Still, these figures are recent: there are other themes important to me, other moods.

"See (taking down an oil titled *Slaughtered Cock*). That's my morbid turn, and *that* (indicating a drawing of a rotund woman with head swivelled) is where my humour comes out. See, that was one of my Tzaneen *tannies* watching a bird."

Style: Tell us about living in Tzaneen.

"Well, it's a nice place. No disturbances; one can do a decent day's work. I'm not keen on Johannesburg. Too many distractions. And then, I'm not floundering any more, so I don't have to run to every exhibition to see what others are doing. Still, we keep up contacts and come up to the city fairly regularly. But every artist is a recluse, dammit. When you're with your work, you're alone.

Style: Luckily you're not entirely alone. Your wife, Karin, is an accomplished artist. How do you react to your Des 'n Dawn media image?

"No! Uh-uh. We have *nothing* to do with that sort of thing. She paints and I paint and we just happen to be married. But we don't ugh . . . collaborate. Where have you ever heard of that anyway? That's so corny!"

Style: And for the present?

"I read, I walk, I listen to music. I paint. Mostly I paint. Let me tell you something: a student once came to Matisse and said: 'How can I paint like you?' And Matisse said: 'Well, cut off your tongue and go and work.' " – **MÉIRA COOK**

Tadeusz Jaroszynski's one-man exhibition of oils and gouaches is on at the Everard Read Gallery, Rosebank, Johannesburg, from May 15 to June 2.

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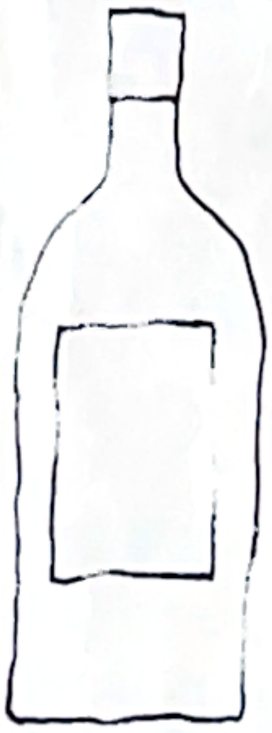

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